

Constitution

(Adopted by the National Convention, June 1962, with major later additions and deletions noted.)

Preamble:

Students for a Democratic Society is an association of young people on the left. It seeks to create a sustained community of educational and political concern: one bringing together liberals and radicals, activists and scholars, students and faculty.

It maintains a vision of a democratic society, where at all levels the people have control of the decisions which affect them and the resources on which they are dependent. It seeks a relevance through the continual focus on realities and on the programs necessary to effect change at the most basic levels of economic, political, and social organization. It feels the urgency to put forth a radical, democratic program counterposed to authoritarian movements both of Communism and the domestic Right. [From 1965, "program whose methods embody the democratic vision."]

Article I: Name

The name of the organization shall be Students for a Democratic Society.

[Article II: Affiliation (Dropped, 1966)]

The Students for a Democratic Society shall be affiliated with the League for Industrial Democracy, Inc., a tax-exempt educational foundation concerned with the extension of democracy into all areas of social, political, and economic life.]

Article III: Membership

Section 1. Membership is open to students, faculty and others who share the commitment of the organization to democracy as a means and as a social goal.

Section 2. SDS is an organization of democrats. It is civil libertarian in its treatment of those with whom it disagrees, but clear in its opposition to any totalitarian principle as a basis for government or social organization. Advocates or apologists for such a principle are not eligible for membership. [From 1965, "to any anti-democratic principle as a basis for governmental, social, or political organization."]

Section 3. Dues. There shall be a national initiation of one dollar, supplemented by periodic dues, the amount and period of which shall be determined by the National Council. [From 1965, amount not specified.]

Section 4. Associates. Individuals who do not wish to join the SDS, but who share the major concerns of the organization, may become associates with rights and responsibilities as denned by the National Council.

Article IV: Chapters and Affiliates

Section I. Any group of five or more members may apply to the National Executive Committee [from 1963, "National Office"] for a charter as a chapter.

Section 2. A chapter may be chartered at any meeting of the National Council on recommendation of the National Executive Committee. It must be considered for chartering at the first meeting of the National Council after it has submitted a membership list, a constitution or statement of principles, and notification of elected National Council representative to the National Executive Committee. In the period between submission of the required information to the national office and the next National Council meeting, the chapter may be given a provisional charter at the discretion of the President. [From 1966, "A chapter may be chartered by the regional council of the area in which it is organized, or by the National Council. The chapter shall submit a

membership list, a constitution or statement of principles, and notification of officers or regional representatives. Chapters may be provisionally recognized by the President or appropriate regional officer pending the meeting of the National Council or regional council respectively."]

Section 3. Chapters are expected to operate within the broad terms of policy set by the National Convention and the National Council. Points of conflict should be referred to the National Council and a procedure established to make the issue public to the organization. In matters judged to be detrimental to the interests of the organization, the National Council shall have the power to cease whatever activity that has been brought into question. The matter shall be finally resolved by the National Council in meeting or referendum.

Section 4. Associated Groups. Independent groups can affiliate as associates of SDS by vote of their membership and designation of a liaison representative to sit on the National Council with consultative vote. The representative shall be a member of SDS. Such association is provisional until the approval of the National Council. The form of the relationship shall be worked out in each case between the group and the National Council.

Section 5. Fraternal Organizations. National or regional organizations whose programs and purposes are consistent with the broad aims and principles of SDS can be invited by the National Council to be fraternal with the SDS and have a fraternal vote on the National Council. Such organizations shall appoint a liaison representative who shall be a member of SDS.

Section 6. SDS welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with other individuals and organizations in jointly sponsoring specific action programs and joint stands on specific issues. The National Council shall be empowered to determine specific cooperative activity.

(Cooperation does not imply endorsement.)

[From 1966, Regional Organization

Section 1: All or some of the chapters and/or members in a given geographical area may constitute themselves a region of SDS. New regions shall submit their constitutions and be recognized provisionally by the President pending the next regular National Council meeting. All disputes over regional boundaries shall be resolved by the National Council.

Section 2: Regions of SDS shall hold at least one membership convention each year and may establish regional officers as deemed necessary.

Regional programs, staff, and offices shall be responsible to decisions arrived at by a democratically constituted regional council.

Section 3: While fundamentally responsible to their regional constituency, regions are expected to operate within the broad terms of policy set by the National Convention and National Council. Any points of conflict shall be finally resolved by the National Council.

Section 4: If one-third of the duly chartered chapters in the geographical area of a region so petition, the National Council shall immediately consider whether to declare the regional organization defunct and to prohibit it from speaking or acting on behalf of SDS.]

Article V: Convention

Section 1. The SDS shall meet in convention annually, at a time and a place fixed by the National Council, with at least three months prior notice being given to all members.

Section 2. The Convention shall serve to debate major issues and orientation of the organization, to set program mandates to the

national staff, and to elect national officers. The Convention shall not be the policy-making body on specific resolutions.
Section 3. Representation. Chapters shall elect Convention delegates on the basis of one delegate for every five SDS members in the chapter, each delegate to have two [from 1966, "five"] votes at the Convention. Individual SDS members shall have the right to attend the Convention with one vote each. [Dropped, 1966.] Delegates from associated and fraternal groups shall be elected by a procedure determined by the National Council. The National Council shall draft Convention rules, accreditation procedures, and other requirements.

Article VI: National Council

Section 1. The National Council shall be composed of (1) one representative elected from each chapter with five to twenty-five members, and one additional representative for each additional twenty-five members [from 1968, "five members"] or fraction thereof, in that chapter; (2) the seventeen National Officers; (3) elected liaison representatives from associated groups (with consultative vote); (4) liaison representatives from fraternal organizations (with fraternal vote); and (5) national staff (without vote). In all cases, NC members and liaison representatives must be members of SDS. [From 1964, "No more than three members from one chapter or associated group may serve concurrently as National Officers."]

Section 2. The National Council shall be the major policy making and program body of the organization. It shall determine policy in the form of resolutions on specific issues within the broad orientation of the organization; determine program priorities and action undertaken by the organization consonant with the orientation and mandates set by the convention; advise the National Executive Committee on financial matters; confirm committee chairmen, staff representatives to the LID board; charter chapters, associated groups, and fraternal organizations. [From 1963, NEC dropped and additional budget responsibilities added.]

Section 3. The National Council shall meet at least two times [from 1963, "four"] a year. A quorum shall be 40 percent of the voting members. Chapter and liaison representatives may be represented by a designated alternate from that group.

[Article VII: The National Executive Committee (Dropped, 1963.)]

Section 1. The National Executive Committee shall be composed of the seventeen officers elected by the convention with the chapter representatives on the National Council serving as alternates. No more than three members from one chapter or associated group can serve concurrently on the NEC]

[Article VIII: Administrative Committee (Dropped, 1963.)]

Section 1. The Administrative Committee shall be located at the place of the national office and shall have as members all NEC members in the vicinity of the national office plus such other people as are approved by the NEC]

[From 1963, National Interim Committee]

The President shall have the power to call a meeting of a temporary National Interim Committee, to be composed of the seventeen National Officers (from 1967, also "on a regular basis"), for emergencies only. Decisions of this body shall be subject to National Council approval.]

Article IX: National Officers and Staff

Section 1. The National Officers shall be the President, the Vice President, and fifteen other Officers, all to be elected at the Convention and to serve as members of the National Council. [From 1967, "National Secretary, Education Secretary, and Inter-organizational

Secretary" and "eight other officers."] The Convention may on a year-to-year basis create other officers as seem necessary and shall designate their voting rights in the various bodies of SDS.

Section 2. The National Officers must have been members of the SDS at least two months prior to elections.

Section 3. The National President is the spokesman of SDS. He shall be responsible for carrying out organizational policy and shall convene the National Council. He shall be assisted by the Vice President, and in case of vacancy the Vice President shall assume his functions.

Section 4. The National Secretary shall be the chief administrative official of the organization, responsible to the President and the National Council. He shall be appointed by the NC for a stated period of time. The National Council may also create and fill additional positions of Assistant National Secretary to work under direction of the President and National Secretary. Other staff positions shall be created and filled by the National Secretary.

[From 1967, "Section 3: The eleven National Officers are the spokesmen of SDS. They shall be responsible/or seeing that organizational and political policies are carried out and shall convene the National Council. Political responsibility lies with the three Secretaries in consultation with the other officers. The three Secretaries shall work out of the national office. Important decisions in any one area which are made between meetings of the National Interim Council are to be made by the three national officers together. The officers shall be responsible to the Convention and the National Council.

Section 4: The National Secretary shall have primary responsibility for the implementation of national programs approved by the Convention or National Council.

Section 5: The Inter-organizational Secretary shall have primary responsibility for liaison with other organizations, both national and international, and for informing the membership about these groups. He/she shall not attend congresses, accept money, or establish formal relationships with organizations without the approval of the convention, the National Council, or, in emergency, the National Interim Council.

Section 6: The Education Secretary shall have the primary responsibility for the functioning of the internal education program."]

[Article X: Relationship With the League for Industrial Democracy (Dropped, 1966.)

Section 1. The SDS shall be autonomously constituted, though its policy and functioning shall be within the broad aims and principles of the LID]

Article XI: Parliamentary Authority

In all cases not covered by this Constitution, Robert's Rules of Order, Revised Edition shall be the authority governing SDS business.

Article XII: Policy and Discipline

Section 1. Any member of the organization, including the Officers, may be expelled or relieved of duties by a two-thirds vote of the National Council. Due process shall be followed in all cases.

Section 2. Any two chapters, or one-third of the National Council, can initiate a national referendum on any question.

Section 3. All material sent out in the name of the organization shall have the approval of a majority of the National Council and shall have been submitted to all of the NC members.

Article XIII: Amendments

This constitution may be amended by one of three procedures:

- a. by a two-thirds vote of the Convention in session on amendments introduced at the Convention, in which case the amendment will take effect at the following Convention;
- b. by a two-thirds vote of the Convention in session on amendments introduced by distribution to the membership at least a month before the Convention, in which case the amendment will take effect immediately upon adoption;
- c. by a two-thirds vote of the membership in referendum in which case the amendment will take effect immediately upon adoption.